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Back in the U.S.S.R.: Ann Arbor's Ardis Publisher and Russian Literature: An Exhibit of Books and Archival Material

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BACK IN THE U.S.S.R.

*Ann Arbor's Ardis Publishers
and Russian Literature*

**AN EXHIBIT OF BOOKS AND
ARCHIVAL MATERIALS**

**SPECIAL COLLECTIONS LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN**

SEPTEMBER 8 – DECEMBER 23, 2009

BACK IN THE U.S.S.R.

*Ann Arbor's Ardis Publishers and
Russian Literature*

September 8 - December 23, 2009

Curated by
Janet Crayne

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Introduction

Welcome to this exhibit featuring materials selected from the Ardis Papers, housed in the University of Michigan Special Collections Library.

Ardis Publishers was founded in Ann Arbor in 1971 by Carl R. Proffer and Ellendea C. Proffer. It became arguably the foremost publisher outside of Russia dedicated to Russian literature, and produced works in both English and Russian.

The story of Ardis is one of connections in an era of obstructions. This exhibit shows the tangible evidence of those connections across many miles – from Ann Arbor to Moscow, from the Proffers to Joseph Brodsky and other authors, from writers to artists, and from publishers to their reading public. Through letters, essays, drawings, magazines, and books, the connections are made visible.

We are very grateful to Janet Crayne, Head of the Slavic and East European Division of the University of Michigan Library, who acted as curator of this exhibit. Thanks to her vision, skill, and research talents, the story of this amazing publisher's activities in the pre-*Glasnost* world is vibrantly reflected in the papers, books, and ephemera of their archive. Thanks are also due to Kathryn Beam, Curator Emerita in the Special Collections Library, for her assistance in planning this exhibit in its early stages, to Kate Hutchens of the Special Collections Library for her assistance in design and publicity work, to Kathleen Dow, Head of Archival Processing, for her assistance in using the Ardis Papers, and to Leyla Lau Lamb, Senior Conservator of Books, for her assistance in mounting the exhibit.

Peggy Daub, Director
Special Collections Library

History of Ardis

In 2003 two Russian curators from Saint Petersburg came to see an exhibit that had just been installed at the University of Michigan. I asked them if they had been acquainted with Ann Arbor before coming here, and they looked at me as if I were crazy. One of them said simply “Ardis!” Even a generation earlier, Carl Proffer explained, “If you’re a writer here, you know about Random House...It’s like that in the Soviet Union with us. They know who the Proffers are. And they get us their stuff.”

Despite its name-recognition among specialists throughout the world in the past decades, Ardis had modest beginnings as a publisher. In the late sixties Carl and Ellendea Proffer were two young scholars on an academic exchange program in Moscow. They took along a letter of introduction from Princeton University’s Clarence Brown to Nadezhda Mandel’shtam, the wife of the late poet Osip Mandel’shtam. Ellendea attributes their connections with the Russian intellectual world to her, because it was through her social circle they met people such as the poet Joseph Brodsky and Elena Bulgakova, widow of the author Mikhail Bulgakov. In Mandel’shtam’s apartment they were introduced to a “real” history of Russia and Soviet Russia, based on personal accounts. In her history, *Ardis: 25 years of Russian Literature*, Ellendea cites as an example a couple in their nineties, the Iviches, who described a meeting that the husband had had with Alexander Blok, a major writer identified with late Russian/early Soviet culture. It was here that the Proffers met the dissident Lev Kopelev, a former camp internee with Alexander Solzhenitsyn, for the first time. From these connections the Proffers established strong professional and/or friendly ties. Through another connection Tania Loskutova became Ellendea’s close friend and served as a conduit between Russian artists and the Proffers in the U.S., herself keeping *samizdat* and films of manuscripts for them. Her husband was a collector of Russian rare first editions, and gave the couple a green hard-backed copy of Osip Mandel’shtam’s *Kamen’* (Case 10).

In 1969 Carl and Ellendea were staying in the former Hotel Armenia in Moscow. They were deeply entrenched in Russian culture, but were desperate to read something new in English. A package arrived from *Playboy* via diplomatic pouch: the galleys for Nabokov’s *Ada*. *Playboy* was about to publish an excerpt from the novel and wanted Carl to provide comments on it. Surprising as it was (Ellendea called it “mindbending”), it was quite reasonable that Nabokov would recommend Carl, a Nabokov scholar, to critique the excerpt. The Proffers constantly vied with one another as they craved to read more, by stealing the proofs from one another. Thereafter “*Ada* had a special place in ... [their] memories”,

symbolizing the intensity of their Russian experience, their hunger for something new in English, and having a new Nabokov novel to stave off that hunger. Later, on their way back to the U.S. in summer 1969, they visited Vladimir and Vera Nabokov in Montreux, Switzerland. They discovered that Nabokov had erroneously assumed that the Soviet educational system rendered potential readers unable to understand his work. The Proffers gave them the gratifying news that his books had been smuggled in despite being banned, and the Russians were not only reading but hotly discussing his works.

In fall 1969, following their travels, Carl was mulling over an idea that he had for a journal: one that would be devoted to the older, frequently glossed-over Russian/Soviet writers, as well as the younger artists, deserving of translation. Each issue would have a different theme. In 1969 they called together a group of friends to show them the proposed table of contents for the first issue of the fruit of this idea, *Russian Literature Triquarterly*. By spring 1971 Carl began to typeset the journal and gave it to a local firm for publication. Ellendea provided layout and design. They selected as a logo the image of a carriage (Case 2) created by the Soviet artist Vladimir Favorsky (1886-1964), to represent Pushkin's definition of translation: "the post-horse of enlightenment." Ellendea explains, "When it came time in 1971 to name the publishing house that existed only in his [Carl's] mind, he thought of *Ada*, a novel which takes place in a mythical place blending features of both Russia and America, quite like our own life. The key scenes of the novel take place at Ardis Hall, a literary family estate ... filled with Nabokov's own love for the estates of his Russian childhood. Carl turned to me and said, 'We'll call the publishing house Ardis.'"

Following the publication of the first edition of *RLT*, they reprinted two books as facsimiles, one of which was Bulgakov's *Zoikina kvartira*. The other was Mandel'shtam's *Kamen'*, which had been given to them in Russia. They had tried to pass it on to Nadezhda, but she turned it down, saying that she had it committed to memory (as she had done to preserve much of her husband's work, see Case 10). In 1972 Ardis published its first book-length translation, Andrei Bely's *Kotik Letaev*.

In the beginning there were two, and then three, full-time staff working for Ardis. Friends donated time when issues had to be packaged and mailed. *RLT* became quite successful because, as Ellendea put it, "...the journal revolutionized the study of Russian culture for many people..." As a money-making enterprise, Ardis was not as successful. The costs of publishing *RLT* out-stripped any profits. In all twenty-four issues of *RLT* were published, with the last issue devoted exclusively to Vladimir Nabokov.

1972 marked the year when the Proffers became aware that they had become publishers. They moved to a larger house and hired more people, bringing the number of staff up to

six, with proofreading done by others. In the same year Nabokov agreed to let them reprint his out-of-print works and they became Joseph Brodsky's publisher. In fact Brodsky had already given his works to the couple while he was still in Russia. In 1975 a manuscript was taken by train out of Russia by an author's girlfriend, and then was sent to the Proffers from Vienna. The author wasn't identified but the manuscript came with a note asking if they wanted it. When the manuscript was accepted, they were told the author's name: Sasha Sokolov, and the manuscript they accepted was *School for Fools*. Lev Kopelev's memoirs (published in 1977 in English translation and then in 1978 in the Russian original) came to Ardis through news correspondents via diplomatic pouch. This work, *Khranit' Vechno / To be Preserved Forever*, which described life in Stalin's prisons and labor camps, "... began to make the authorities suspect we were not as harmless as we seemed."

Ardis had become a publisher of original Russian-language works by Soviet writers. These now included authors who were already popular in the Soviet Union, and who were members or had applied for membership in the Writers' Union. All of their previous works had been edited to conform with Soviet publishers' standards, but Ardis published uncensored versions. "They [Soviet writers], and we felt they could take this risk without too much danger of reprisal—their fame was a sort of protection, or as we all hoped."

In 1982 Vasilii Aksenov, a well-known and popular author, along with colleagues, created a mock-up of the anthology, *Metropol* (Case 5) and submitted it in Russia for publication. The Proffers agreed to publish it if it were banned, so when it was, it was sent to them. Ardis published *Metropol*, as promised, but the consequences of this action were severe. Most of the contributors were banned from any publication and the Proffers were banned from the Soviet Union, which meant that Carl, who had been diagnosed with cancer in 1981, died before he could return there.

After Carl's death in 1984 letters and telegrams from friends and scholars poured in, expressing their sympathies, but a friend such as Tanya Loskutova, in the Soviet Union, was not allowed to attend. In large part thanks to Ron Meyer, Mary Ann Szporluk and Rachel Oksenkrug, Ardis continued to publish. In 1989 Ellendea was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship and in 1994 Ardis moved from Ann Arbor to Dana Point, California. In 2002 Ardis Publishers sold most of its literature translated into English to Overlook Press. By the time of the sale Ardis's publishing activity included reprints of unavailable classics, translations of mainly 20th century *belles lettres*, translations of major critical works, original monographs on literary figures and movements, and original works of Russian literature.

In the 1990s about half of the Ardis archive came to the University from several sources, and included correspondence, photographs, sound and video recordings, rare books and

artwork, manuscripts and proofs, newspaper clippings, etc., as well as business records. The other half was acquired in 2005.

This exhibit celebrates Ardis Publishers by providing a glimpse of its history, breadth of coverage, style, and intent as well as its legacy to the University of Michigan Library. This story can't be told without including the people whose lives connected all of this: Ardis founding editors, Ellendea Proffer Teasley and the late Carl Proffer, without whose inspiration, diligence and commitment Ardis would not have existed at all.

Janet Crayne, Head
Slavic and East European Division

CASE 1: HISTORY OF ARDIS

***Russian Literature is better than Sex*, 1976.**

The verso of the poster contains a list of Ardis publications.

***Ardis [Catalog]*, 1984.**

***Russian Literature Triquarterly*, v. 14 (Winter) 1976.**

One of the editors of this volume is Christine Rydel, our speaker at the exhibit opening.

To Subscribe or Order:

Order form for ***Russian Literature Triquarterly***.

Letter from Robert Kaiser of The Washington Post to Mary Ann Worklan.

The letter recommends Ellendea Proffer for the MacArthur Fellows Program.

Three photographs of Anna Akhmatova used in the Russian Literature Triquarterly.

The Ardis Collection contains numerous photographs, many of which were used in the journal.

CASE 2: LOCAL AND REGIONAL ATTENTION

“Russia’s Secret Voices” May 8, 1983 *Chicago Tribune Magazine*.

“Russia’s Secret Voices” November 14, 1982 *Magazine of the Detroit News*.

“Carl and Ellendea Proffer” January 9, 1983 *Magazine of the Detroit News: Michiganians of the Year.*

“Getting the Word Out” January 9, 1983 *Toledo Magazine.*

Ardis Horse and Carriage Logo

The logo is based on an illustration by Vladimir Favorsky (1886-1964). It was selected for the logo because the Russian poet Alexander Pushkin referred to translation as the “post-horse of enlightenment.”

CASE 3A: COMPLEXITY OF CONDUCTING BUSINESS WITH RUSSIAN CLIENTS (AND FRIENDS)

[No date] Correspondence from Igor Efimov to Carl Proffer.

This is a list of people and each one’s attributes.

January 29, 1975. Correspondence from Lev A. Rahr of Possev Verlag in Frankfurt-am-Main to Carl Proffer.

[No date] Correspondence from Igor Efimov to Carl Proffer.

A rough translation: “...the little icon forgotten by you awaits you on our dinner table...Tanya Loskutova forgot all your presents and begged you (she called from Moscow) to pick them up...”

The objects described in this letter were materials related to the Proffers’ publishing activities, and Tanya Loskutova was a friend of the Proffers, who held for and delivered to them items relating to publishing .

December 14, 1975. Correspondence from Carl Proffer to Igor Efimov.

Carl Proffer made it possible for Efimov’s two books to be published abroad,

under his pseudonym, A.Moskovit.

“...for the delivery by the Efimov postal service...” meant that information would be delivered by Efimov in the Soviet Union.

January 14, 1976. Correspondence from George Byrne of Marymount College in Tarrytown, N.Y. to Carl Proffer.

Microfilm from Igor Efimov accompanied the letter.

March 14, 1977. Correspondence from Carl Proffer to “Sirs”.

CASE 3B: COMPLEXITY OF CONDUCTING BUSINESS WITH RUSSIAN CLIENTS (AND FRIENDS) (CONTINUED)

December 12, 1977. Correspondence from Carl Proffer to N.B. Tarasova of Possev Verlag.

April 21, 1978. Correspondence from Lev Rahr of Possev Verlag in Frankfurt-am-Main to Carl Proffer.

June 27, 1978. Correspondence from Carl Proffer to Igor Efimov in Vienna.

No date. Typescript of a portion of Efimov’s c.v. along with the version printed up for him.

The section shown lists Efimov’s publications under the pseudonym A. Moskovit separately.

April 28, 1978. Correspondence from Luda Shtern to Carl Proffer.

CASE 4: THE THIRD WAVE

December 18, 1974. Correspondence from Carl Proffer to Lillian Hellman.

December 18, 1974. Correspondence from Carl Proffer to Heinrich Boll.

May 12, 1974. Correspondence from Carl Proffer to “Everybody”.

April 25, 1974. Correspondence from Carl Proffer to Heinrich Boll.

June 21, 1974. Correspondence from Carl Proffer to “Everyone.”

Book jacket design for [No date] Хранить вечно [To Be Preserved Forever]

Barry James in Moscow [sic]. “New Cause Célèbre in Russian Literature?” June 23, 1976. *Majorca Daily Bulletin*.

Vladimir Voinovich. *Жизнь и необычайные приключения солдата Ивана Чонкина [Life and Unusual Adventures of the Soldier Ivan Chonkin]*. Paris: YMCA, 1975.

Vasilii Aksenov. *Круглые сутки нон-стоп [Twenty-Four-Hour Cycle Non-Stop]*. No imprint information.

Contains the inscription: “To Joe Redford, the word-crafter...in remembrance of the rain shower in New York, I send kisses, be healthy, your Vasilii.”

Olga Matich and Michael Heim. *Третья волна: русская литература в эмиграции [The Third Wave: Russian Literature in Emigration]*. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1984.

Vasilii Aksenov. *Ожог [Burn]*. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1980.

Andrei Bitov. *Дни человека: Повести [Days of a Man: Short Stories]* Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1976.

Errata list compiled by Andrei Bitov.

CASE 5: *METROPOL*

Метропол: литературный альманах [Metropol: literary almanach]. [1979?].
Folio-sized mock-up, upon which the published volume was based.

Метропол: литературный альманах [Metropol: literary almanach]. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1979.
Published volume.

Helen Muchnik. “*Metropol*” February 27, 1983, *New York Times Book Review*.

CASE 6: THIRD WAVE CONTEMPORARIES

Bella Akhmadullina. *Сны о Грузии [Dreams of Georgia]*. Tbilisi: Merani, 1979.
A collection of poetry.

IUrii Trifonov. *Starik [Old Man]*. Moscow: Sovetskii Pisatel', 1979.
A short story.

I. Pal'min. *Живописная Россия [Picturesque Russia]*. Moscow: s.n., 1979.

A handmade book of photos. Both photography and layout by Pal'min.

Andrei Amalrik. *Записки революционера [Notes of a Revolutionary]*. Zhanto, Switzerland: s.n., June 14, 1978.

This was the last proof edited by the dissident Amalrik before his death.

CASE 7: PORTRAITS OF ICONS OF RUSSIAN/EARLY SOVIET CULTURE

IUrii Annenkov, text by Evgenii Zamiatin. *Portrety [Portraits]*. [Petersburg]: Petropolis, 1922

This publication came with the second accretion of Ardis materials. With the exception of the publisher Grzhebin, and H.G. Wells, all the portraits are of Russian/early Soviet writers.

CASE 8: JOSEPH BRODSKY (1940-1996) IN RUSSIA AND AMERICA

Joseph Brodsky was born in the Soviet Union and gave up formal schooling at the age of fifteen. He studied Polish and English, Greek mythology and Russian religious philosophy on his own. He began writing poetry at 18. By the time he was twenty three he was in jail for “social parasitism.” He was exiled for 5 years at hard labor in Arkhangelsk, but served only a portion of that time. The poet Anna Akhmatova (see Case I for her photographs, and Case 10 for her book) dedicated a collection of her poetry to him. In 1972 he was forced out of the Soviet Union, and he settled in Ann Arbor where he taught at the University of Michigan. Eventually he left Ann Arbor, and taught on numerous university campuses, including Cambridge University. In 1981 he became a MacArthur Foundation Fellow. In 1987 he received the Nobel Prize for Literature.

A Part of Speech. New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1980 in English. ***The first Russian-language edition (Chast' rechi) was published in Ann Arbor by Ardis in 1977.***

Rough translation: "For Carl and Ellendea from their fifth child—Joseph"

June 12, 1972[?] Correspondence from W.H. Auden to Carl Proffer.

Clarence Brown. "***The Best Russian Poetry Written Today: Part of Speech***" in *New York Times*, September 7, 1980.

At Princeton University, from 1959 to 1999, Clarence Brown was a Professor of Russian Literature, and later of Comparative Literature. When the Proffers went to study in the Soviet Union, they took a letter of introduction from him to Nadezhda Mandel'shtam. Please see Case I and the History of Ardis in the catalog for more information.

"Gorenje" [Burn]. Typescript. Published in *Kontinent*, v. 36 (1983) p. 7-21 along with other poems by him.

George L. Kline. "**On Joseph Brodsky**" in *Antaeus* No. 6, Summer, 1972, p. 99-113.

When this issue was just going to press, "...word came out that Brodsky had been compelled to leave the Soviet Union. During the 1972-73 semester, Brodsky will be poet-in-residence at the University of Michigan." This quote is from a footnote to the first page of the article on Brodsky, on p. 99.

Debut. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1973. Lettered copy "P"

Autographed by the author.

Translation into English by Carl Proffer.

Stikhotvoreniia i poetry [Verses and poems]. Washington, D.C.: Inter-Language Literary Associates, 1965

Rough translation: "To the best man and his (also best) woman—that means to the Proffer family. My worst book with all its mistakes and with all my admiration. Joseph Brodsky. From Russia With Love."

CASE 9: RARITIES FROM THE ARDIS COLLECTION

Перезвоны [Chimes]. Riga: “Salamandra”, 1925-1929.

Evgenii Kharitonov. *Автопортрет [Self-Portrait]*

Bella Akhmadullina. *Сад-Всадник [Garden-Rider]*. Typescript.

Mikhail Kuz'min and Vsevolod Voinov. *Д. И. Митрохин. [D.I. Mitrokhin]*.

Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1922.

This book contains plates bearing Mitrokhin's work. The floral designs in this case are from his work. Please note that the cover of this book is a facsimile and not the cover itself. The background of the exhibit poster is also based on one of Mitrokhin's designs from this book.

David Samoilov. *Поэт и Гражданин [Poet-Citizen]*.

Typescript.

CASE 10: RARITIES FROM THE ARDIS COLLECTION

Evgeny Zamyatin. “The Future of the Theatre” in *Abraxas: a Journal for the Study of Philosophy, the Humanities, and the Social Sciences*. Vol. 1, No. 1, Fall, 1970.

Mikhail. Bulgakov. *Дьяволиада [Diaboliad]*. Moscow: Nedra, 1925.

Evgenii Zamiatin. *Наводнение [The Flood]*. Leningrad: Pisatelei, 1930.

Marina TSvetaeva. *Взяли [They took]*.

This manuscript is probably in Marina TSvetaeva's own handwriting. On the back is another poem and a fragment of a third.

Osip Mandel'shtam. *Камень: Стихи [Stone: Verses]* St. Petersburg: Akme, 1913.

This book was given to the Proffers as a present from a Russian friend, in Russia.

Zinaida Gippius i Dmitrii Merezhkovskii. *Литературный смотр: свободный сборник [Literary Review: Free Collection]*. Paris: "Dom knigi", 1939.

Gippius and Merezhkovskii affiliated themselves with Symbolism in Russia in the early twentieth century. They emigrated to Paris.

Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin. *Братья разбойники [Brother Bandits]*. Moscow: A. Semena, 1827.

In 1822 Pushkin, arguably Russia's greatest poet, wrote the poem "Brother Bandits", but later burning it. A fragment was printed in 1825, but whether it was marketed or published is disputable. This poem, dated 1827, is called the second edition by some. It was printed and marketed but never released to the public. There were about 900 copies of the 1827 edition printed. The watermark on the paper used indicates that the paper was made by an Uglich paper mill after 1818, when the mold for this specific sheet of paper was created.

Lev Shestov. *Власть ключей=Potestas Clavium [Power of Keys]*. Berlin: Skify, 1923.

A major Russian critic. Beside the volume is a corrected contents page from it.

Iulii Aikhenval'd. *Похвала праздности [Praise of Idleness]*. Moscow: Kostry, 1922.

A major critic and artist.

Вопросы литературы и драматургии [Questions about literature and dramatic composition]. Leningrad: Academia, 1924.

The description below the title reads in English: "Debate in the State (Maly) Theater in Moscow on May 26, 1924 under the chairmanship of A. V.

Lunacharskii...” The list of participants includes poets, novelists and critics such as V.V. Maiakovskii, B. Pil’niak, and D. Chizhevskii.

Correspondence from Herbert Marshall to Carl Proffer.

Marshall wanted recognition because he was the authorized translator of Akhmatova’s poetry.

Anna Akhmatova. *Подорожник: Стихотворение [Plantain: Poetry]*. Petrograd: Petropolis, 1921.

This one is numbered edition 4.

CASE 11: VLADIMIR NABOKOV IN RUSSIA, EUROPE AND AMERICA

Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977) was born into nobility in Russia, but moved with his family to England, and then Germany after the Revolution. His father played an active role in émigré politics, and died trying to protect Pavel Miliukov from an assassin’s bullet. Vladimir married Vera Slonim in the early nineteen twenties. Due to the increasingly anti-Semitic environment in Germany, they moved to France, and eventually the United States. Nabokov had several prominent positions at American universities as a lepidopterist and a professor of Slavic languages. He moved to Montreux, Switzerland in 1961, and died there 16 years later.

Vladimir Nabokov. *Laughter in the Dark*. Indianapolis & New York: The Bobbs Merrill Company, 1938.

This is the first United States edition of *Kamera obskura: roman*.

V. Sirin. *Kamera obskura: roman [Camera Obscura: novel]*. Berlin: Izdatel’stvo Sovremennia zapiski i Parabola, 1933.

V. Sirin was the pseudonym that Nabokov used in his early works.

Vladimir Nabokov. *Pnin*.

This typescript was probably edited by Vera, Vladimir Nabokov's wife.

Letter from Carl Proffer to Igor Efimov, dated July 21 [no date]

This letter conveys the reaction that Vera Nabokov had to Efimov's translation of a Nabokov poem. His wife was a very strong supporter of her husband's works, and had definite ideas about how his work should be treated. In her New York Times obituary it was written: "Vera Nabokov, 89, Wife, Muse and Agent", 11 April 1991".

Vladimir Nabokov. *Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1941.

This is the first American edition of this title, preceding the British title.

